

Message Text

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ACTION EB-12

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FM AMEMBASSY LIBREVILLE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 5794

INFO AMEMBASSY PARIS

USDOC WASHDC

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: ETRN, BEXP, GB

SUBJ: TRANSGABON RAILROAD: GE BID ON LOCOMOTIVES

COMMERCE FOR CONGER

REF: STATE 211528; LIBREVILLE 1220

1. FOLLOWING RECEIPT OF INFORMATION HERE SEPT 30 FROM OCTRA THAT DECISION TAKEN TO AWARD ENTIRE LOCOMOTIVE LOT TO FRENCH COMPANY, I CALLED PRESIDENT BONGO IN PARIS ARGUING DESIRABILITY FROM GOG POINT OF VIEW OF INCLUDING U.S. FIRM IN SOME VISIBLE FASHION IN RAILROAD PROJECT AND POINTING OUT FACAT ATH ONLY GE LOCOMOTIVE BID REMAINING. I RECALLED BONGO'S FREQUENT COMMENTS DURING HIS TRIP TO U.S. THAT HE WANTED U.S. FIRMS TO COME TO GABON AND POINTED OUT DISCOURAGING IMPACT WHICH WOULD RESULT FROM EXCLUDING AMERICAN FIRMS FROM RAILROAD. (I DID NOT MENTION THAT TAMS ALREADY HAD CONTRACT AND THAT OCTRA INTERESTED IN PURCHASING RAILS FROM U.S.)

2. PRESIDENT BONGO THANKED ME FOR CALL, SAID HE AGREED WITH ME AND WOULD LOOK INTO MATTER IMMEDIATELY. I LATER RECEIVED PHONE CALL FROM RAWIRI FROM PARIS SAYING THAT ON INSTRUCTIONS OF PRESIDENT BONGO EVERY EFFORT BEING MADE TO FIND SUITABLE CONTRACT FOR U.S.

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FIRM IN CONNECTION WITH RAILROAD AND ASKING ME IF I COULD SUGGEST

ANY OUTSIDE OF LOCOMOTIVES SINCE DECISION ON LOCOMOTIVES HAD ALREADY BEEN MADE. I AGAIN ARGUED STRONGLY IN FAVOR OF GIVING GE AT LEAST HALF OF LOCOMOTIVE LOT AND HIS ONLY ARGUMENT WAS THAT GABONESE ANXIOUS TO STANDARDIZE THEIR LOCOMOTIVES WITH INTERCHANGEABLE SPARE PARTS. RAWIRI SUGGESTED I EXPLORE MATTER FURTHER WITH OCTRA DIRECTOR MASSON IN LIBREVILLE.

3. FOLLOWING SEVERAL CONVERSATIONS WITH MASSON AND FURTHER CALLS TO RAWIRI IN PARIS, LATTER FINALLY AGREED IN CONVERSATION A FEW MINUTES AGO TO GO BACK TO FORMULA OF SIX LOCOMOTIVES FROM GE AND SIX FROM FRENCH FIRM PROVIDED GE WOULD AGREE TO SETTING UP SOME SORT IF AFTER SALES MAINTENANCE AND SPARE PARTS FACILITIES IN LIBREVILLE. RAWIRI SAID THAT THIS WAS OF KEY IMPORTANCE AS GABONESE COULD HARDLY BE EXPECTED TO HAVE TO GO TO U.S. EVERY TIME THEY NEEDED A LOCOMOTIVE SPARE PART. I SAID I WOULD IMMEDIATELY SEND WORD TO GE THROUGH STATE DEPARTMENT CONCERNING THIS REQUIREMENT. RAWIRI THEN CONFIRMED THAT ON ASSUMPTION THIS AGREEABLE TO GE HE WOULD INFORM FRENCH FIRM THAT LAST MINUTE CHANGE IN DECISION HAD BEEN MADE BY GABONESE AND THAT FRENCH COMPANY WOULD ONLY GET ORDER FOR SIX INSTEAD OF TWELVE LOCOMOTIVES. RAWIRI SAID HE WOULD BE SPEAKING TO FRENCH FIRM TOMORROW MORNING AND SUGGESTED I CALL HIM BACK LATER IN DAY.

4. IT CLEAR THAT FRENCH FIRM INVOLVED HAS PUT GREAT PRESSURE ON GABONESE, THAT GREEN LIGHT HAD ALREADY BEEN GIVEN THEM FOR ENTIRE LOCOMOTIVE LOT AND THAT ABOVE LAST MINUTE CHANGE IN GABONESE DECISION RESULT OF GABONESE RELUCTANCE TO DISPLEASE U.S. FOLLOWING MY TELEPHONE CALLS TO BONGO AND RAWIRI. IT BY NO MEANS CERTAIN THAT ABOVE DECISION DESCRIBED AS FINAL BY RAWIRI MAY NOT YET BE CHANGED TOMORROW IF FRENCH APPLY MAXIMUM PRESSURE. WE SHOULD, HOWEVER, HAVE BETTER IDEA AFTER RAWIRI HAS SPOKEN TO REPRESENTATIVES OF FRENCH FIRM.

5. ACTION REQUESTED. ALTHOUGH GE REPLY CONCERNING SETTING UP SPARE PARTS FACILITIES IN LIBREVILLE NOT REPEAT NOT EXPECTED BY TOMORROW, IT OBVIOUS THAT THE SOONER GE CAN REPLY THE BETTER. WOULD REQUEST, THEREFORE, THAT DEPARTMENT CONTACT GE, EXPLAIN SITUATION AND OBTAIN GE REACTION. SHOULD BE NOTED THAT ALTHOUGH INITIAL SALE OF SIX LOCOMOTIVES MAY SEEM SMALL, IT ONLY THE BEGIN-LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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NING. THERE WILL BE MANY MORE LOCOMOTIVES BOUGHT AS RAILROAD EXPANDS AND CONTRACT WILL GO TO FIRM PROVIDING BEST EQUIPMENT AND SERVICE. OBVIOUS THAT HIGHLY VISIBLE AMERICAN LOCOMOTIVES IN GABON WILL HAVE FAR GREATER IMPACT ON GABONESE SALE OF RAILS OR ENGINEERING CONTRACT AND THEREFORE BY THEIR VERY PRESENCE PROMOTE SALES OF OTHER U.S. PRODUCTS.
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